



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page#.4172-4186

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

From Social Emotional Learning to Psychological Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Meaning in Life in Emerging Adulthood

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ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being becomes paramount during emerging adulthood owing to identity exploration, transitions, and enhanced responsibility. In contemporary positive psychology, resource theories focus on strengths and promote flourishing instead of prevention of pathology. In particular, researchers tend to focus on social emotional learning and meaning in life as two of such resources. However, little work has been done in relation to mediators of their relationship. This research investigates the relations between the three variables above with regard to the role of meaning in life as mediator of psychological well-being during emerging adulthood. Quantitative cross-sectional mediation design was used in conjunction with the purposive sampling method. There were 310 emerging adults aged between 20 and 29 years participating in the study. These included undergraduate students, graduate students, and university graduates. Social Emotional Learning Scale, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale were used for the assessment. It was found that social emotional learning had a positive correlation with meaning in life ($r = .96, p < .001$) and psychological well-being ($r = .96, p < .001$) and meaning in life correlated strongly with psychological well-being ($r = .93, p < .001$). Mediation analysis showed that there was a significant indirect effect ($B = .06, 95\% CI [.03, .09]$).

Keywords: social emotional learning; meaning in life; psychological well-being; emerging adulthood; positive psychology; mediation

1 Introduction

The process of moving from adolescence into adulthood has experienced a lot of changes in the past several decades. The classical signs of adulthood such as having stable occupation, marrying, and achieving financial independence tend to happen much later in life than before. In such a way, the new developmental period known as emerging adulthood becomes prominent (Arnett, 2000, 2015). Spanning from the late teens into the twenties, emerging adulthood is defined by the identity exploration, instability, self-focusedness, possibilities, and feeling of being neither an adolescent nor

adult anymore (Arnett, 2000). Although this developmental period provides emerging adults with certain opportunities, it also poses a number of challenges.

Students and recent graduates often face various problems related to academic performance, job uncertainty, changes in relationships, and responsibility for life decisions. These challenges may affect the psychological state of emerging adults and general psychological functioning. Recent international evidence shows that emerging adults suffer from higher levels of psychological distress, emotional difficulties, and decreased well-being. The promotion of psychological well-being becomes one of the key public health and educational priorities now (Rodríguez-Sáez et al., 2025). As a result, the psychological science becomes less focused on deficits and psychopathology and more interested in psychological resources enabling individuals to succeed despite difficult situations.

In the framework of the positive psychology movement, psychological well-being becomes one of the key signs of optimal functioning. While hedonic approaches view well-being through the lens of life satisfaction and pleasure, eudaimonic approaches stress the importance of meaning, personal growth, self-acceptance, and purposeful engagement with life (Ryff, 1989). Ryff and Keyes (1995) propose to view psychological well-being as multidimensional concept including such aspects as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Together, these dimensions become the sign of achieving human potential and optimal psychological functioning.

It is especially important to talk about psychological well-being during emerging adulthood since this period includes many identity explorations and planning of life. People who claim to experience higher level of psychological well-being become more resilient, perform better academically, have better relationships with other people and good mental health outcomes (Sanchez-Sanchez et al., 2025). Those people who lack it face emotional distress, decreased motivation and difficulties of adaptation to developmental changes. For this reason, the study of psychological factors facilitating psychological well-being during emerging adulthood becomes a relevant scientific and practical issue.

The psychological resource which might facilitate well-being during this period is social emotional learning. It means that social emotional learning refers to the process of acquiring and applying knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to understand and regulate emotions, build positive relationships, make decisions, and navigate through social environments (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). Modern conceptualization of social emotional learning distinguishes five key dimensions of this skill: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making.

Social emotional learning was originally developed to provide educational and psychological advantages for children and students. However, current research proves that the benefits of social emotional competences extend far beyond academic performance and childhood period. There is a connection between social emotional competencies and emotional regulation, resilience, interpersonal skills, adaptive coping strategies, and mental health outcomes (Shah et al., 2025). Emerging adults who possess good social emotional competencies will be able to navigate through uncertainty, handle their interpersonal relationships, and respond adequately to different stressors during their transition to adulthood.

Among various social emotional competencies, self-awareness deserves special attention because it forms the basis for emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and decision-making. Self-awareness is the

ability to recognize emotions, values, strengths, limitations, and motivations, understand their influence on our behavior and relationships with others (Qureshi et al., 2023). Recent studies conducted in Pakistan show that interventions targeted at social emotional learning significantly improve self-awareness and lead to personal transformation of prospective teachers (Qureshi et al., 2023). Moreover, digital storytelling intervention improves broader social emotional learning competencies (Qureshi & Iqbal, 2023).

The role of social emotional learning becomes especially significant during emerging adulthood because this period is characterized by the necessity to make crucial decisions concerning education, career, relationships, and identity commitments. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory, the resolution of such problems is vital for proper psychological development and functioning in adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Current identity research continues to prove the importance of identity development during this period and shows high correlation between identity coherence and psychological adjustment (Branje et al., 2021; Janowicz et al., 2025).

However, social emotional competencies themselves cannot fully explain the differences in the level of well-being between emerging adults. More and more attention is paid to existential and meaning-related processes which help people interpret their experiences, build narratives about life and create purpose. One of such processes is the meaning in life.

The concept of meaning in life occupied a central place in existential, humanistic and positive psychology for a long time. Frankl (1985) argues that the basic driving force behind human behavior is not the pursuit of pleasure or power but rather the pursuit of meaning. Logotherapy asserts that people have "will to meaning" and the inability to find purpose, significance, and direction of life results in psychological difficulties. Frankl argues that meaning helps individuals to overcome difficulties, endure hardships and maintain psychological well-being in spite of adversity. Current reviews prove the importance of logotherapy and existential analysis for psychological health and well-being (Rahgozar & Giménez-Llort, 2020; Szabó & Baji, 2025).

In the framework of current psychological science, the meaning in life is seen as the multidimensional construct which includes two dimensions – presence of meaning and search for meaning (Steger et al., 2006). Presence of meaning is the degree to which people feel that their lives are purposeful, coherent, and meaningful, while the search for meaning is the actual search of purpose and understanding. Both dimensions have an impact on human functioning, however, presence of meaning shows stronger connections with positive psychological outcomes and adjustment (Steger et al., 2006). This distinction is especially important for emerging adulthood because this period is characterized by both active search and establishment of stable life goals and identities.

Meaning in life in emerging adulthood is an area that has received great attention from scholars in recent years. In their efforts to make decisions about education, career, romantic relations, and other future endeavors, people often ask existential questions about themselves, about purpose, and about where they are going. Emerging adults that have greater meaning in life show more resilience and better adjustment (Arnett, 2015). Supporting this argument, Rahman et al. (2025) found a significant positive correlation between meaning in life, resilience, and life satisfaction among Pakistani emerging adults.

Meaning in life also tends to predict flourishing and good psychological health in international samples of emerging adults. For instance, Chmiel and Kroplewski (2025) reported that meaning in life mediates the relationship between personal values and psychological well-being in emerging adults. It shows that

the process of constructing meanings could be a mechanism through which internal resources become beneficial for psychological functioning. Interventions involving meaning-centered strategies show promising results in terms of improving emotions and well-being, thus highlighting the importance of meaning in life as an essential psychological resource (van Doornik et al., 2024). Also, systematic reviews reveal that interventions based on logotherapy and meaning-centered approaches can contribute to improvements in both existential and psychological outcomes among clinical and non-clinical groups (Aiello-Puchol & García-Alandete, 2025).

The link between meaning in life and well-being is theoretically and empirically compelling. According to the eudaimonic well-being model introduced by Ryff, personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and positive relations with other people are essential components of flourishing (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Some of these domains of well-being are conceptually related to meanings. Hence, people who find their lives meaningful are likely to be psychologically well. Meanings provide the necessary frame for understanding experiences, working towards goals, and staying motivated in times of stress.

There is a growing number of empirical evidence supporting this relationship. Recently, emotion regulation and positive evaluations about oneself were found to contribute substantially to psychological well-being among university students and emerging adults (Sanchez-Sanchez et al., 2025). Likewise, interventions aimed at improvement of emotion regulation and socioemotional skills led to significant improvements in mental health and well-being of young adults (Bozkurt et al., 2025). Another research involving Spanish university students highlights the importance of socioemotional competencies in promoting psychological health of emerging adults (Rodríguez-Sáez et al., 2025). Overall, it seems reasonable to suggest that socioemotional skills and existential resources can contribute to well-being. Despite growing interest among scholars in the issues of social emotional learning, meaning in life, and psychological well-being, the mechanisms connecting these variables have been poorly studied. Existing research often investigates the issue of social emotional learning in relation to academic performance, classroom behavior, and emotional regulation while meaning in life is mostly studied in connection with resilience, life satisfaction, and mental health outcomes. Little is known about how meaning in life works as a mediator in the association between social emotional competencies and well-being of emerging adults in non-Western contexts.

It is important since the impact of social emotional learning on well-being can be achieved not only through emotional and interpersonal pathways but also via fostering the development of meaning and purpose. People with well-developed socioemotional competencies usually display better self-understanding, effective emotion regulation, good interpersonal relations, and adaptive decision-making. All these features can help in developing one's identity and creating a life narrative which contributes to psychological well-being. This pathway is conceptually consistent with the theory of social emotional learning, logotherapy, and psychosocial theory of identity.

Thus, the present study draws on four theoretical frameworks. The Social Emotional Learning framework provides an explanation of the development and acquisition of socioemotional competencies (CASEL, 2020). Logotherapy introduced by Frankl describes the importance of meaning in life as a motivational and existential resource underlying human functioning (Frankl, 1985). Erikson's psychosocial theory places all these processes in the developmental perspective of emerging adulthood and underlines the significance of identity formation and self-discovery in this stage of life (Erikson, 1968). Finally, according

to the Self-Determination Theory, psychological well-being arises when individuals are autonomous, competent, feel relatedness and strive to achieve the goals which are consistent with their true selves (Ryan & Deci, 2000). From these theories, it can be argued that socioemotional skills can foster the process of meaning making, which promotes well-being.

Hence, the aim of the present study is to examine the relationships between social emotional learning, meaning in life, and psychological well-being among emerging adults aged from 20 to 29 years. Also, the present study intends to investigate the mediating role of meaning in life in the association between social emotional learning and well-being.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Social emotional learning will be positively associated with meaning in life among emerging adults.

H2: Meaning in life will be positively associated with psychological well-being among emerging adults.

H3: Social emotional learning will be positively associated with psychological well-being among emerging adults.

H4: Meaning in life will significantly mediate the relationship between social emotional learning and psychological well-being among emerging adults.

2 Method

Research Design

In the current study, the quantitative cross-sectional mediation research design was adopted in order to examine the relationship between social and emotional learning, meaning in life, and psychological well-being among emerging adults. This design is seen to be the most suitable for the current study since it helps in studying the relationships between psychological variables in one time period.

Participants

The respondents were selected through purposive sampling, where specific inclusion criteria were put in place. The intended population comprised of young adults between the age of 20 and 29 years who were in various educational institutions pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees or had completed their education in the university. The total number of respondents selected for the study was 310, out of which 53% were males while 47% were females.

Measures

The measure of social-emotional learning used in this study was Social Emotional Learning Scale developed and validated by Qureshi and Iqbal (2023). This instrument was designed for the measurement of socioemotional competencies among prospective teachers and is based on the CASEL model of social-emotional learning. It includes five factors: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. Respondents rate the statements on the five-point Likert-type scale. The higher scores indicate better socioemotional skills. According to Qureshi and Iqbal (2023), psychometric properties and internal consistency of this instrument were satisfactory within the context of Pakistani education. For the current study, reliability analysis in terms of Cronbach's alpha coefficients was conducted to estimate the reliability of the whole scale and its factors.

For measuring meaning in life, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire developed by Steger et al. (2006) was employed. The questionnaire comprises 10 items that represent two factors: Presence of Meaning and Search for Meaning. While Presence of Meaning is defined as an evaluation of one's sense of meaning

and purposefulness, Search for Meaning is associated with the effort to find meaning in life. Response options include the seven-point Likert scale from 1 (absolutely untrue) to 7 (absolutely true). As per the original instructions, the negatively worded items were reverse-coded before analysis. The psychometric properties of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire proved to be good across different cultural settings, which makes it the most used tool in the field (Steger et al., 2006). As meaning in life was considered as an explanatory mechanism in the current study, both subscales were analyzed.

To assess the psychological well-being, the 18-item version of Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale was utilized, whose psychometric properties were confirmed by Bayani et al. (2008). This measure includes six factors of eudaimonia: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents rate the statements on the seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Consistent with the original scoring procedure, the negatively worded items were reversed prior to computation of the scores. The higher the score is, the higher the psychological well-being is. This instrument proved to have satisfactory reliability and validity in multiple cultural contexts, and became one of the most popular in psychological well-being research (Bayani et al., 2008; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Procedure

Before any data were collected, the participants were made aware of the objectives of the study, and it was made clear to them that their participation in the study was voluntary. The data were gathered through self-report questionnaires, either via electronic means or by hand-written questionnaires, as per participant availability and willingness. Inclusion criteria were used to filter out appropriate participants, who then went ahead to fill the questionnaire after giving informed consent. It took the participants 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The order in which the questionnaires were filled was standardized from the start. The participants first completed demographic details and then the Social and Emotional Learning Scale, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire and the Psychological Well-Being Scale. This order was chosen in order to avoid any response contamination.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles that have been internationally recognized for research studies conducted on humans were followed in the current study. Detailed information related to the purpose of the study, procedures and its voluntary nature was provided to the participants prior to the start of the experiment. All the participants signed informed consent forms prior to collecting any data. The participants were made aware of the fact that they could quit the study at any time without facing any consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured during the entire study process. There was no personally identifiable information in the dataset, and the information provided was only used for academic purposes. The dataset was kept secure and was accessible to the research team only. Since the current study was non-invasive and involved self-report questionnaire testing of non-clinical psychological constructs, there was little risk associated with it.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data was done in accordance with the methodologies that have been traditionally used in psychology as well as in mediation analyses. Before performing hypothesis testing, the data set was screened for missing values, outliers, and violations of assumptions. Descriptive statistics was provided, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis for all variables under study.

The internal consistency of the study measures as well as their subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to explore correlations between social emotional learning, meaning in life, psychological well-being, and their dimensions.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was then conducted to identify relationships between the constructs under study. In order to find out whether there is a mediating effect of meaning in life on the relationships between social emotional learning and psychological well-being, the mediation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro Model 4. The indirect effect was estimated using bootstrapping, the number of samples being equal to 5,000. Mediation was regarded as statistically significant if the confidence interval of the indirect effect did not contain zero value.

It is important to note that in this research both overall constructs as well as their dimensions were analyzed in order to get a better idea about the mechanisms underlying the relationships between social emotional learning and psychological well-being in emerging adulthood.

Data Preparation and Scoring

Before conducting any statistical analysis, all tests were rated based on their respective rating instructions. All reverse-scored questions from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire and the Psychological Well-Being Scale were re-coded prior to calculating overall and sub-scale scores. Composite scores for the five social-emotional learning scales, the two meaning in life scales, and the six psychological well-being scales were computed. Furthermore, overall scores were computed for each of the three main variables to be used in correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

3 Results

A total of 310 emerging adults aged between 20 and 29 years participated in the study. The sample comprised undergraduate students, graduate students, and university graduates recruited through purposive sampling. Males constituted 53% of the sample whereas females represented 47%.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 310)

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	<i>f (%)</i>
Gender	Male	164	52.9
	Female	146	47.1
Educational Status	Undergraduate Students	124	40.0
	Graduate Students	124	40.0
	University Graduates	62	20.0
Age Range	20–22 years	106	34.2
	23–25 years	102	32.9
	26–29 years	102	32.9

The mean age of participants was 24.47 years ($SD = 2.91$).

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Internal consistency analyses indicated satisfactory to excellent reliability for all study measures and their subscales. The findings support the psychometric adequacy of the instruments within the present sample.

Table 2**Reliability Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables**

Variable	Items	α	Mean	SD
Social Emotional Learning	48	.95	250.32	36.08
Self-Awareness	10	.89	52.47	8.21
Self-Management	9	.87	47.01	7.44
Social Awareness	9	.88	47.36	7.51
Relationship Management	11	.91	57.11	8.52
Responsible Decision-Making	9	.88	46.37	7.17
Meaning in Life	10	.89	52.32	8.00
Presence of Meaning	5	.86	26.51	4.61
Search for Meaning	5	.82	25.81	4.28
Psychological Well-Being	18	.92	94.11	13.82
Self-Acceptance	3	.81	15.89	3.08
Positive Relations	3	.79	15.27	2.91
Purpose in Life	3	.83	15.88	2.98
Environmental Mastery	3	.80	15.34	2.85
Personal Growth	3	.84	15.97	3.01
Autonomy	3	.78	15.74	2.94

The mean scores suggest relatively high levels of social emotional learning, meaning in life, and psychological well-being among participants.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to examine the relationships among the principal study variables.

Table 3**Correlations Among Social Emotional Learning, Meaning in Life, and Psychological Well-Being**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Social Emotional Learning	250.32	36.08	—		
2. Meaning in Life	52.32	8.00	.96***	—	
3. Psychological Well-Being	94.11	13.82	.96***	.93***	—

$p < .001$.

The results revealed strong positive associations among all study variables. Social emotional learning demonstrated a very strong positive correlation with meaning in life ($r = .96, p < .001$) and psychological well-being ($r = .96, p < .001$). Similarly, meaning in life was strongly associated with psychological well-being ($r = .93, p < .001$). These findings provide preliminary support for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

Regression Analyses

To test the mediation model, regression analyses were performed following the procedures recommended by Hayes.

Table 4**Regression Analysis Predicting Meaning in Life From Social Emotional Learning**

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-0.70	1.31	—	-0.54	.592
Social Emotional Learning	0.21	0.00	.96	56.92	< .001

Model Statistics: $R^2 = .913$, Adjusted $R^2 = .913$, $F(1, 308) = 3240.31$, $p < .001$.

Social emotional learning significantly predicted meaning in life and explained 91.3% of the variance in the mediator variable.

Table 5**Regression Analysis Predicting Psychological Well-Being**

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	1.91	1.94	—	0.98	.327
Social Emotional Learning	0.31	0.02	.82	17.44	< .001
Meaning in Life	0.26	0.08	.15	3.21	.001

Model Statistics: $R^2 = .930$, Adjusted $R^2 = .929$, $F(2, 307) = 2038.49$, $p < .001$.

Both social emotional learning and meaning in life significantly predicted psychological well-being, jointly accounting for approximately 93.0% of the variance in the outcome variable.

Mediation Analysis

A mediation analysis was conducted to determine whether meaning in life mediated the relationship between social emotional learning and psychological well-being.

Table 6**Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Social Emotional Learning on Psychological Well-Being Through Meaning in Life**

Effect	B	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Total Effect	0.37	0.34	0.40
Direct Effect	0.31	0.28	0.35
Indirect Effect	0.06	0.03	0.09

The results of the mediation analysis showed that the meaning in life played a role in mediating the association between social emotional learning and psychological well-being. The indirect effect proved to be significant, as the bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero ($B = .06$, 95% CI [.03, .09]). Social emotional learning was still significantly related to psychological well-being even when the mediator variable was included in the model, suggesting partial mediation. The mediation model and standardized path coefficients are shown in Figure 1.

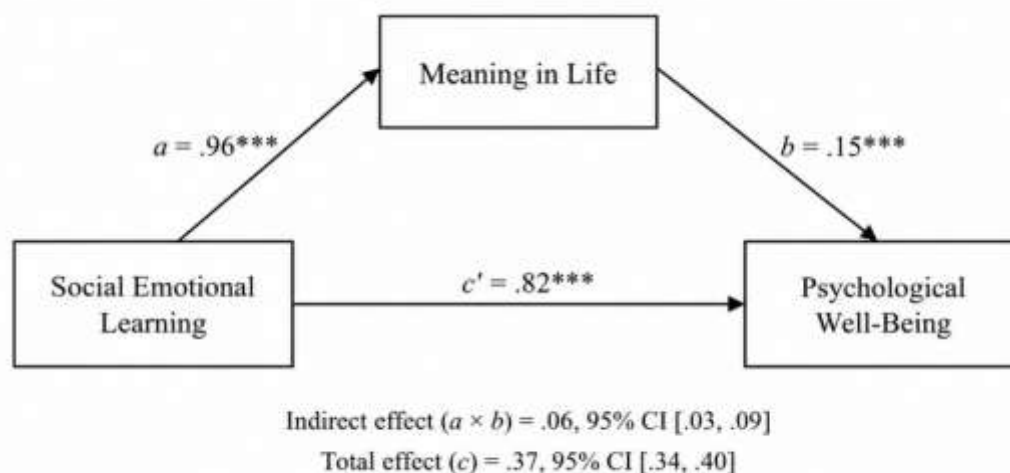


Figure 1. Mediation model and standardized path coefficients.

The findings collectively suggest that social emotional learning contributes both directly and indirectly to psychological well-being among emerging adults, with meaning in life functioning as an important psychological mechanism underlying this relationship.

4 Discussion

This paper explored the relationships between social emotional learning, meaning in life, and psychological well-being and examined the mediating effect of meaning in life in the relationship between social emotional learning and psychological well-being in emerging adults. In accordance with the hypotheses, the findings revealed the significant relationships between all of the above-mentioned variables and confirmed the mediating effect of meaning in life. This study adds to the current literature of positive psychology and provides support for the significance of socioemotional and existential resources during emerging adulthood.

First, the first hypothesis stated that there would be a positive association between social emotional learning and meaning in life in emerging adults. According to the findings, emerging adults with strong socioemotional competencies perceive their lives as more meaningful than those who lack such competencies. Theoretically, these findings are congruent with the Social Emotional Learning Theory, according to which self-awareness, emotion regulation, social understanding, and responsible decision making contribute to self-functioning and self-understanding (CASEL, 2020). Emerging adults who are aware of and can manage their emotions better are expected to be able to identify personal values, set meaningful goals, and construct a coherent life story.

Moreover, these findings are consistent with the previous research, which stresses the developmental significance of self-awareness and socioemotional competencies. For example, Qureshi et al. (2023) found that interventions promoting social emotional learning resulted in better self-awareness and personal transformation of prospective teachers. In the same vein, Qureshi and Iqbal (2023) identified that digital storytelling promotes the development of socioemotional skills and contributes to personal growth. The current findings extend the knowledge about socioemotional competencies as they suggest that such skills can be helpful not only in educational settings but also in the context of existential development.

Second, the second hypothesis stated that there would be a positive relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being. The results fully supported this hypothesis and showed that emerging adults, who find more meaning and purpose in their lives, feel psychologically well. This conclusion is in accordance with logotherapy by Frankl (1985), in which it is stated that pursuit and achievement of meaning is a crucial motivating factor for human functioning. Meaning allows individuals to find a direction in life and provides significance, which enables individuals to cope with developmental problems and maintain psychological functioning amid uncertainties.

These findings are also consistent with the previous research showing the connection between meaning in life and positive psychological functioning. For instance, Rahman et al. (2025) found that meaning in life, resilience, and life satisfaction were positively interrelated among Pakistani young adults, suggesting that meaning in life serves as a psychological resource for early adulthood. Similar results were obtained by Chmiel and Kroplewski (2025), who identified that meaning in life mediates the relationship between personal values and psychological well-being in emerging adults. Meaning-based interventions also have shown positive effects on psychological and existential aspects of human functioning (Aiello-Puchol & García-Alandete, 2025; van Doornik et al., 2024).

Third, the third hypothesis stated that social emotional learning would positively predict psychological well-being. The results confirmed this hypothesis and showed that participants with strong social emotional learning competencies were characterized by better psychological well-being. These findings are consistent with recent studies, which show that socioemotional competencies play an essential role in adaptive functioning and mental health in young adults. For example, Rodríguez-Sáez et al. (2025) stress the importance of socioemotional factors for mental health of university students. Also, Bozkurt et al. (2025) identified that intervention programs aimed to improve emotional efficacy increase the level of psychological well-being of emerging adults. In turn, Sanchez-Sanchez et al. (2025) found that emotional regulation and self-perception positively influence psychological well-being of university students.

The most important contribution of this study consists in the finding of the mediating role of meaning in life. This finding shows that socioemotional competencies lead to psychological well-being not only directly but also indirectly because they affect meaning in life of individuals. Thus, the findings of the current study allow to integrate Social Emotional Learning Theory, Logotherapy, Psychosocial Identity Theory of Erikson and Self-Determination Theory.

According to logotherapy, individuals with strong socioemotional competencies are better able to interpret their experience, construct coherent life goals, and search for sources of meaning and purpose. Then, this results in greater psychological well-being and flourishing (Frankl, 1985). From the perspective of Erikson's theory, emerging adulthood is the time of active self-definition and identity exploration, and meaning creation becomes especially significant at this stage (Erikson, 1968). Modern identity research confirms this view and emphasizes the importance of identity and future orientation in psychological well-being of emerging adults (Branje et al., 2021; Janowicz et al., 2025; Maehler & Hernández-Torrano, 2025).

Finally, Self-Determination Theory states that psychological well-being appears when individuals meet the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness and pursue the goals that correspond to their values and authentic selves (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Social emotional learning facilitates these processes by

increasing the emotional and social competencies, while meaning in life provides the motivational and existential framework for achieving well-being through socioemotional functioning.

Practical Implications

There is a range of implications of the results obtained in the present study for educational institutions, mental health professionals, and policymakers. The importance of promoting psychological well-being among students in addition to academic success is being acknowledged by universities more and more often. The present results imply that interventions focused on the development of socio-emotional learning can help emerging adults not only increase the meaning in their lives but also promote their psychological well-being.

Educational institutions might consider implementing the programs related to socio-emotional learning in the university curriculum and the process of working with the students. Such programs will help to develop emotional skills, social skills, and decision-making processes and at the same time to encourage self-reflection and construction of the meaning. The interventions based on logotherapy can also be useful in counseling and psychological assistance provided by higher education establishments.

The results of the study are highly relevant in the context of developing countries, where emerging adults often face economic difficulties, unemployment problems, and other social changes which affect negatively their psychological well-being.

Limitations

However, apart from all its benefits, there are some limitations of the current study that should be considered while interpreting the results obtained. First of all, due to its cross-sectional design, the present study cannot draw any causative links between the examined variables. Future longitudinal studies would allow establishing these links.

Secondly, purposive sampling reduces the ability of the results to be generalized to other populations than the one used by the author. Future studies using probabilistic sampling methods would help to improve this problem.

Thirdly, as the study is based only on self-reporting, there is the chance that the obtained results are subject to common method variance and social desirability bias. Future studies might benefit from including behavioral indicators along with self-reports.

Finally, cultural aspects could affect the process of meaning-making as well as social emotional competences of people. Replication of the present results in another cultural context would be beneficial for this matter.

Future Directions

Future research could include examining the links between socioemotional competence, meaning of life, and psychological well-being through longitudinal and experimental designs. This approach would provide an opportunity for tracing developmental trends and gathering more evidence regarding mediation processes.

Further studies might focus on investigating the mediating and moderating effects of certain components of meaning of life and psychological well-being. Some of the components that could be considered in this regard are resilience, optimism, self-compassion, and emotional intelligence. These variables will help understand better how socioemotional skills influence well-being.

Moreover, cross-cultural studies could be useful as there are likely to be some cultural differences in meaning formation and socioemotional functioning.

Conclusion

Emerging adulthood is a developmental phase which offers many opportunities for personal development but which is simultaneously fraught with considerable psychological problems. Determination of the factors which contribute to the flourishing in this stage of development is thus a valuable research endeavor. This current study showed that social emotional learning, meaning in life, and psychological well-being are highly connected concepts and that the meaning in life is a significant psychological mediator connecting socioemotional skills and flourishing.

It appears that emerging adults who have better socioemotional competencies are more prone to feel meaning and purpose in their lives, which contributes to their psychological well-being. It becomes evident that application of the approach based on human strengths rather than merely psychopathological syndromes and symptoms is crucial in understanding how to promote human flourishing.

Thus, the way of going from the knowledge of oneself to the good life seems to involve not only emotional and interpersonal competencies development but also construction of the meaning and purpose of one's life. These findings show that positive psychology, social emotional learning, and existential perspectives still remain relevant to the problem of well-being in emerging adulthood.

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